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“Global food security and food safety:
The role of universities”

Cavy Between Food Security and Conservation in Kahuzi Biega National Park, Sud-Kivu, DR Congo

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Abstract

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in general and the province of Sud-Kivu in particular are facing serious problems of food and nutrition insecurity due to recurring wars, continued armed conflicts, and poor governance, resulting in low agricultural production. Kahuzi Biega National Park (PNKB) has become the major resource for local populations adjacent to it in order to achieve a certain food security. This includes game hunting, tree felling, and extraction of minerals, among others. However, it contradicts the main goals of the park in terms of nature conservation. To ensure the protection of this heritage of global interest, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the Union of Cavy Keepers in Congo (UECCO), the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN) and local communities have developed a project for cavy (*Cavia porcellus*) production.

The main objective of this project is to help communities around PNKB to increase cavy production through adequate housing, quality feed of sufficient quantity, controlled reproduction, and disease management. In addition, the communities receive training in culinary preparations and cavy marketing. Choosing cavies as an alternative for bushmeat consumption in the conservation strategy of PNKB is determined by the advantages that this small animal offers, such as being a strict herbivore, its high feed conversion ratio, the high growth rate and, especially, the significant levels of high-quality proteins in its meat as well as the low fat content. Cavy manure is also used as fertiliser and, thus, helps increase the production of market garden crops such as cabbage, onions, and potatoes. Vegetables grown with cavy manure are highly appreciated in the market.

Since its inception in 2016, the project has reached about 600 households with 150 families effectively involved. On average, beneficiary households keep 38 cavies, selling about 6 animals per month and consuming 3 per week. As so-called ‘local champions’, many cavy producers from the project area have become trainers in the region. Eventually in the eastern region of DRC, cavies have demonstrated to be a secure source of income and contribute to the empowerment of women, youth/children and former hunters.

Keywords: Bushmeat, food and nutrition security, guinea pig, income, nature conservation, protected area, women empowerment, youth participation